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FAR EAST

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2. India favors release of Korean prisoners prior to reconvening of General Assembly:

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Indian UN delegate Krishna Menon told Ambassador Allen on 27 December that his government believes a phased evacuation of the Korean prisoners from the demilitarized

zone could begin on 23 January, thus making it unnecessary for the UN to discuss their disposition.

Menon also said that his government intends to have Madame Pandit seek to recall the UN General Assembly on 9 February. The purpose of the session would be to give the Indian government an opportunity to report on the armistice and to obtain directives for any further action.

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Comment: Menon's observation apparently represents India's present position. Prime Minister Nehru in a speech on 23 December had suggested that the prisoners might be held beyond the deadline if further detention seemed necessary to reach a settlement.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

3. French plan to retake Thakhek:

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According to Commissioner General Dejean, General Navarre plans to reoccupy Thakhek, the Mekong River post in central Laos abandoned last week. Dejean told the American chargé on 28 December that five parachute battalions are being flown from the Tonkin delta to augment French forces in the Thakhek area which already approximate in numbers the eight-battalion Viet Minh attack force.

The previous day General Navarre had said that he was not unduly worried over the Viet Minh push to the Mekong, but admitted it might throw his offensive plan somewhat off schedule.

Comment: The Viet Minh forces in central Laos and Annam are believed inadequate to repulse a determined French effort to retake Thakhek.

The major Viet Minh military threat is posed by the forces in northwest Tonkin, now the equivalent of at least two divisions. These units could invade northern Laos or, as the French expect, attack the 12 French battalions at Dien Bien Phu in northwest Tonkin. The American military attaché in Saigon reports increasing indications of an attack on the latter objective.

The Viet Minh advance into central Laos was apparently designed to force a dispersal of French reserves from the vital delta area and thus prevent any French build-up that might threaten its base areas.

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NEAR EAST - AFRICA

4. Renewed Anglo-Egyptian talks unproductive:

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At an informal talk with British negotiators on 26 December, the Egyptians were even firmer than on 22 December regarding concessions on the questions of availability of the Suez base and of uniforms for British technicians, according to British ambassador Stevenson. As a result of the meeting, Stevenson is now "even gloomier than before" on prospects for a settlement.

The Egyptians reportedly stated that the Suez base could become available automatically only in the event of an attack on an Arab state, and they would make no concessions whatever on the question of uniforms.

Comment: Before the meeting, Vice Premier Nasr had told American embassy officials that Egypt would not make any new concessions. He had indicated that the present talks are being held merely because the regime "needs a little more time to prepare for the consequences of a break with Britain."

The Anglo-Egyptian talks which were suspended on 21 October were reopened informally on 22 December following Ambassador Stevenson's return from London.

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